

Whole Language For Sale

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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PURPOSE OF THESIS

This paper seeks to discuss and provide understanding of the educational movement known as whole language. The discussion begins by sharing the beliefs of whole language and extends these beliefs by presenting elements and activities common to the whole language classroom. Finally, the role of evaluation in whole language is explored in terms of its purpose and implementation in order to bring the understanding of whole language full circle.

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Whole language; what in education's name is it? Can I do it? Should I like it? Is it for me? Throughout the first three years of my teacher training, I had encountered the term "whole language" several times. Each time I heard the term it seemed to be just a passing mention within a professor's lecture, and each time I seemed to give it just a passing thought. However, as I entered my fourth and final year of training, I was faced with creating an Honors College thesis. I was convinced that my thesis must deal with education, only natural for something that had become so much a part of my life. The question was, what was there about education that I really wanted to be enriched by. It was not that the many educational topics did not interest me, but rather, none GRABBED me! With the time, energy, and thought that this project would take as a final thesis, I knew very well that whatever the topic was, it would definitely have to "grab" me. I strained and belabored educational topics to find that just right topic for what seemed like weeks on end.

Little did I know that browsing through a friend's issue of Teaching K-8 during a classroom lecture would provide me my topic. As I browsed through the magazine, a whole language special issue, I began to read the introduction to the special section containing whole language. There, in just a few sentences, was the answer to my thesis topic. "Whole language." It sounded interesting. Could it possibly work? No way. I just couldn't buy it. On the other hand, I couldn't get the

idea out of my mind, and it was for that reason that I chose to create an Honors thesis on whole language. I couldn't buy the concept, but maybe, just maybe, by the end of my project, I might.

This paper is a reflection of what I did find out about whole language. Through this paper, I intend to share what whole language is from the beliefs that support it to the activities and elements which commonly characterize the whole language classroom, as well as the evaluation of whole language itself. What I learned and how I now feel is what follows.

To understand whole language, one would believe that a definition would provide optimal understanding. However, with whole language, there is more than a simple definition involved. Whole language, in reality, is a **philosophy** that is derived from cognitive psychology, learning theory, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropology, philosophy, and education (Weaver, 1990). Whole language is not an educational approach that can be purchased from a store or truly modeled from a manuscript. As stated by Altwerger, Edelsky, and Flores (1987, p. 148), whole language is "a lens for viewing, a framework that insists that belief shapes practice." In essence, to understand whole language one must understand the beliefs that embody the whole language philosophy. While understanding the beliefs, one must also understand that with whole language, nothing is concrete. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of understanding whole language is the fact that because

it is considered a philosophy composed of beliefs, there is no one answer, no one guide, no one solution. The practices and beliefs are many, and no one person will hold the same set or number of beliefs. It is with this in mind that I attempt to present several of the beliefs that I, in my struggle to understand this phenomena called whole language, hold as important and vital to a whole language philosophy.

One belief important to acknowledge in relation to a whole language philosophy is the emphasis on whole text. In a traditional classroom, emphasis lies upon learning the parts one by one in order to construct a whole. With whole language, however, this is not so. The philosophy of whole language believes that language is indivisible, recognizing that words, sounds, letters, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs are like the molecules and atoms of things and while their characteristics can be studied, the whole is always more than the sum of the parts. For example, if a wooden table is broken down into the parts which compose its whole, it is no longer considered a table. We are able to study the characteristics of the parts such as carbon and hydrogen to assist us in understanding how a table is, but we cannot build a table from them (Goodman, 1986). Such is the belief of whole language. Letters and words do make up what we write and what we read, however, these "parts" in isolation and without context, make learning difficult and contrived for children. Language's cuing systems (phonology in oral, orthography in written language, morphology, semantics,

— syntax, and pragmatics), "are always simultaneously present and interacting in any instance of language in use" (Altwerger, et al., 1987, p. 145). In other words, language IS whole.

The concept of breaking wholes into parts for children to learn seems natural, for in many ways, learning small parts a bit at a time makes the learning easier. On the other hand, when we as educators disassemble the whole, we also disassemble the purpose of language---that of communicating meaning--turning it into abstractions unrelated to the needs and experiences of the children we seek to help (Goodman, 1986).

The whole is important in whole language, and it is this whole to part learning upon which believers base their philosophy. Only in its entirety can language convey its true and full meaning. Once students experience the "whole", they are then more able to understand and investigate the parts that comprise the whole itself (Fountas & Hannigan, 1989).

Within a whole language philosophy also lies the belief that skills are taught within the context of reading and writing. Again in reference to the traditional classroom, skills such as punctuation and sequencing were taught as separate entities as far as writing and reading. Students were drilled with rules and examples and then asked to perform related exercises on worksheets and chalkboards. Whole language sees reading and writing as whole activities. According to Bess Altwerger, Carole Edelsky, and Barbara M. Flores (1987):

— ...any separate skills or subactivities used

outside the total activity are different from that subactivity used within the total activity. Moreover, the subactivity is not merely the behavior. It has a role to play in the total activity; it interacts with other subactivities; it engenders consequences. If the role, relationships, interactions, and consequences are taken away, what is left is only the behavior--meaningless in itself (pp. 147-148).

In other words, skills taught outside of context are less meaningful, while those skills taught within context, though they may be the very same skill, are given meaning and relationship simply by allowing a child to interact with a context. Context provides for the skill a basis for meaning.

In a whole language classroom, children do not practice skills to become literate, but rather they use the skills daily in reading and writing for various purposes, engaging in the kinds of behaviors that characterize the literate adult (Weaver, 1990). As language learners in a whole language classroom, children must invent and try out the rules of language for themselves and presenting skills within a context allows that necessary testing and interaction (Pace, 1991). Granted, children will not be able to invent all of the rules and many times will reflect the need for a skill or strategy to be taught through their reading or writing. It is at this time that the

teacher will teach the skill, but always within the meaningful context.

Those who believe in the whole language philosophy also hold the view that reading and writing exist in a reciprocal relationship. According to Kenneth Goodman (1986), reading and writing are dynamic and constructive processes. Writers must decide what to provide for readers so that they are able to infer and recreate what was written in the first place, while readers in turn bring to the writing their knowledge of text and their values and experiences in order to make sense of it. In this relationship, real writers have something to say and in turn, real readers know how to understand and respond to what the writer says. By reading text, children are able to see how real writing occurs and is used, and ultimately apply the same techniques to their own writing to show the definite reciprocal relationship between reading and writing.

The whole language philosophy believes strongly that to learn, one must be a learner, risk-taker, and decision-maker. This applies not only to children, but the teachers as well. All learning involves risk. As children grow in family settings, their first attempts at language are prized and thus any risk is seemingly diminished for the child. With failure comes freedom to try once more (Goodman, 1986). There is security within the family for the learner child. As the child continues to grow and learn to read and write, he or she observes adults using genuine literacy acts and is therefore able to model an

authentic and purposeful act. As a simple spectator to the act, the child has no pressure to perform and becomes a risk-taking learner.

For teachers and students alike, when the expectation of perfection is eliminated, a must-be-right model of literacy is also eliminated, and thus they can become risk-takers in literacy. When children and teachers alike, as readers, writers, listeners, and speakers, take risks there are without a doubt going to be mistakes and misinterpretations (Watson, 1989). In regard to whole language, teachers realize that these mistakes and misinterpretations are a natural part of learning and present important information regarding the student's development as a language user (Mills & Clyde, 1990). Teachers who hold the whole language philosophy create a climate that encourages children to take risks rather than fear making mistakes and revealing weaknesses that will subject them to remediation (Weaver, 1990). Teachers in whole language classrooms value the personal logic of the children in their classrooms as well as their reading and writing rough draft efforts (Watson, 1989). Clearly, when a child feels no pressure to perform to perfection, he or she is able to let their comfort in knowing that mistakes are acceptable carry them into a learning situation. Risk-taking is an essential component of the whole language classroom, for students must become more flexible and accepting as they become involved with material that is further in knowledge from their personal experience (Goodman, 1986).

Literature plays a large role in the philosophy of whole language. Literature in itself is authentic and real life reading for children as well as adults. The whole language classroom relies greatly upon the authenticity of literature. Through literature, one finds a great variety of dialects and genres, as well as language structures and vocabulary still contained within whole, meaningful text. Many of the well-known favorites are important sources of predictability which is so important to the early reader (Fountas and Hannigan, 1989).

By being immersed in literature, children in a whole language classroom discover the principles of language. If children read, they develop the sense of when to punctuate as they write (Goodman, 1986) and through literature, the relationship of reading and writing once again come full circle. With these points in mind, one easily sees the importance of even student-authored books in regard to the reading and writing relationship, as well as their contribution to the variety and quantity of literature in the whole language classroom.

The whole language classroom relies not only upon literature itself, but more specifically, literature in great numbers and variety. Many types of recreational books are necessary, including fiction and non-fiction, in a wide range of interests and difficulty levels. Children need resource materials of all kinds too, such as beginners' dictionaries and encyclopedias, as well as "real world" resources such as phone books and TV guides (Goodman, 1986). With exposure to

many types of literature, children are able to gather information and explore ideas of all areas of the curriculum and are sure to discover the ways and means of language through their immersion in the authentic context of literature (Weaver, 1989).

The whole language philosophy also holds firmly to the belief that language and literacy are not only learned naturally, but are also socially constructed. The processes of language all happen in the context of our world of events, ideas, and experiences (Goodman, 1986). Even as babies, children learn language without the help of skills activities that have separated the language into individual parts. Young children learn to read and write, just as they learned to speak, naturally though immersion from birth in an environment that is both meaningful and language-rich (Fountas and Hannigan, 1989). Experts say that the average first grader "has already acquired a vocabulary of 10,000 words and assimilated many of the rules of grammar without trying" (Gursky, 1991, p. 23). Children obviously gather this knowledge in a natural manner, for there is no formal schooling or skills teaching present. Children see language in use by adults in real contexts and therefore gain knowledge and mastery through the modeling of these adults and their use of language. It is through these social interactions with others that children learn. Learning undoubtedly involves social interaction. Social provisions in learning allow children to take the natural occurrence of learning beyond their independent problem-solving abilities

— and into the natural process of learning (Pace, 1991).

The belief that reading, writing, and language itself is learned authentically through functional use is yet another facet of the whole language philosophy. In a whole language classroom, teachers want to ensure that children encounter literacy in manners that are reflective of everyday language use (Mills & Clyde, 1990). According to Kenneth Goodman (1986), children learn language as they search to make sense of their world in a personal and social context and it is the practical situation (the real life use) of which the child is a part that influences the purpose and meaning of the language. Children write because they have something to say. Children read because there is something they need to know. Children do not learn to read by reading **reading**; children learn to read by reading signs, stories, packages, newspapers, and billboards (Goodman, 1986). Authentic use of language encourages children to use their experiences in order to make sense of the language and literacy that they encounter and in turn implement authentic language use of their own (Pace, 1991). With authenticity comes meaning for children. With meaning comes an active process of lasting learning (Weaver, 1990) for students who are using language not for the purpose of "getting it done", but rather because the learning "matters to them personally" (Goodman, 1986, p. 31).

Whole language also draws upon the concept of integration as part of its philosophy. As stated by Kenneth Goodman (1986)

in his book, What's Whole About Whole Language?, "If language is learned best and easiest when it is whole and in natural context, then integration is a key principle for language development and learning through language." The processes of language are in constant use for children. To integrate the classroom allows for the interrelationship of the processes to not only be respected, but also form meaning in context for the children as they experience the curriculum (Routman, 1991). It is important to keep in mind that not every lesson or topic needs to involve all of the processes of language. In the whole language classroom, "children learn language as they use language to learn" (Pace, 1991, p. 17). It is important to remember that the children will use the processes of language for a variety of purposes, and it is the intent of these children, as well as the content that will determine the language processes used (Pace, 1991).

A final belief underlying the whole language philosophy is that it creates empowerment and ownership through a child-centered environment. Children are very capable of taking command of their own learning, and the whole language environment facilitates this easily. Whole language teachers realize and demonstrate that the answers to whole language do not reside in a text, but rather within oneself (Rich, 1985). Teachers therefore take the role of a facilitator in the whole language classroom. They see the classroom as a child-centered one where children enjoy learning because they perceive the learning as

— relevant to their own lives and experiences. The teacher then acts not as an authoritarian, but as a resource, coach, and co-learner that shares power and allows the children to make the choices they need (Gursky, 1991). When children are allowed to make the choices they need, the ownership comes forth. Whole language teachers do not choose the books for children to read, nor the topics to write about. They do not correct nonstandard forms, nor spell unknown words for students. In short, whole language teachers do not do for children what the children can do for themselves, and with this comes the ownership of learning. Whole language teachers facilitate the development of ownership. They confer with students on authors, titles, and subjects that they as students would like to see in the classroom and therefore with the choice and involvement, take on ownership of their reading (Routman, 1991).

Now that the whole language beliefs have been shared, what exactly are the activities, or elements of instruction that can be found within a whole language classroom? Just as there is no single set of beliefs for whole language, there is no single set of activities or elements of instruction that can be found within the whole language classroom. In a whole language classroom, there are an endless number of possibilities as far as activities and instruction, however there are several common activities and general elements that do occur frequently.

In this portion of my paper, I will share several of the more common activities and elements, but as I have cautioned

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before, it is important to keep in mind that there is no one right way. In keeping with the whole language philosophy, many of the activities and elements may be adapted in various forms of intensity and approaches in ways that fit with the levels of ownership, integration, skills, functional use, and social cohesion of the students within each classroom. The following descriptions are meant to draw attention to activities commonly used in classrooms that may not be viewed as vehicles for whole language, as well as provide a springboard for implementation within a whole language setting. Many of the activities overlap in the elements of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, however we must keep in mind that these are the elements that develop literate children, as well as fall in line with the philosophy of whole language itself. It is imperative that one understands that although these activities are part of a whole language classroom, without the theory and beliefs behind them, high-level literacy acquisition does not occur. The beliefs must go hand in hand with these activities.

One element found within any classroom where the teacher espouses whole language is a classroom library. A classroom library is essential to a whole language classroom. As discussed previously, literature provides for children authenticity, wholeness, and an endless number of strategies. As stated by Linda Bowers Sheppard (1990), literature not only presents a high quality of language use for children, but its extensive use in the classroom develops independent thinking in children.

Further, literature expands children's knowledge of the world and allows children to share and experience other people, places, and ideas through its stories.

A classroom library should be as extensive as it is varied. The many books that make up the library should be chosen for their high quality in theme, as well as their language (Sheppard, 1990). Many books also lend themselves well to author studies, various genre studies, or studies of certain literary elements (Tompkins & McGee, 1993). These are the books that whole language teachers strive for.

It is particularly important to keep in mind when selecting books for the whole language classroom that students themselves need to be involved. With ownership and decision-making vital beliefs, it is only natural that by consulting the students regarding particular titles, authors, and subjects they would like to have access to in their classroom library, they are given ownership of reading and learning. There is no magic number of books necessary for the whole language classroom either. Regie Routman (1991, p. 428) states that "one hundred to 150 books in various genres is a good number to aim for in the classroom library." According to Gail Tompkins and Lea McGee (1993), many of the teachers that they have worked with have 500 or more books in their classroom libraries. Whole language classrooms typically contain what are termed "literature sets" of books which are simply multiple copies of the same book. These multiple copies allow for collaboration between

students as well as whole class studies. It is equally important to ensure that the classroom library contains a wide variety of non-fiction and fiction, both commercial and student-written, as well as magazines, newspapers, reference books, and dictionaries--in short, reading material of any and all types. Also, the books must be accessible to the children at all times, and the children must be provided time for independent exploration of the literature (Routman, 1991). With the reciprocal role of reading and writing, as well as the primary role of literature itself in the whole language classroom, it is obvious that a classroom library is an essential component to whole language.

Journals are also considered to be an important element in the whole language classroom. Journals come in many different forms, and as with many aspects of whole language, are manipulated to fit the needs of the children and teachers within a classroom. One type of journal seen frequently within a whole language classroom is commonly referred to as a reading response journal. The reading response journal is viewed by many whole language teachers as a method that encourages comprehension and thinking, as well as a way to prepare for literature discussion groups and/or in response to any independent reading that a child might or might not discuss within the class (Weaver, 1990). The format of the response journal can and does vary according to those who are using it and their purposes.

One simple format involves the children writing the title

of the book they have read in the journal, along with a short message about the book and then providing an illustration. The teacher then responds in writing by asking questions which encourages the student to write more (Freeman & Nofziger, 1991). Another variation on this journal involves having the student write the phrase "Before Reading" on a page in his or her journal before starting a new text and writing predictions about the book to be read. Once the student has completed this portion of the journal, he or she writes "During Reading" below this area and uses this section to record any reactions he or she might have through the reading of the book. Once the student has completed the reading, he or she creates a section entitled "After Reading" for responses to portions of the text, or even the text as a whole. Students may include lingering questions from the text in this part of the journal also, as well as identify related themes or literature expansion activities that they would like to explore (Crafton, 1991).

The choices are limitless for what can be contained within these sections. Journals such as these typically are completed on an individual basis, but often students are encouraged to share their writing in large and small literature discussion groups which will be discussed further in this paper. Reading journals are particularly effective for teachers in relating student likes and dislikes, reactions to works of literature, understandings of literature, and footholds on literary conventions to name just a few of the benefits. Further, reading

journals afford the teacher the opportunity to share with the student new questions, interpretations, and extensions on the book, as well as suggestions of new books that the student might enjoy (Weaver, 1990).

Group journals are also an option in the whole language classroom. Often not recognized for what they are, group journal entries may involve a large or small group making a list, a narrative, or line-a-child reactions concerning any topic desired. The entries may be as short as a few sentences, or much longer (Strickland & Morrow, 1990).

Observation journals are yet another form of journal used in many classrooms. These journals too have varied uses. They may be simple observations about a class pet, activity, or field trip (Routman, 1991). They may be as involved as students performing original research and recording their questions, observations, experiments, and discoveries in their observation journal (Crafton, 1991).

Personal journals, most often written in first person, allow students to intertwine diary entries with stories as another form of writing.

Dialogue journals, where the teacher and student, or two students, respond to each other through the journal in brief, informal, and direct writing are another journal format (Routman, 1991). As an added variation to the before mentioned journals, they can become dialogue journals simply by adding written teacher or peer response.

Regardless of the type of journal chosen, several key factors must be pointed out. One, when the teacher responds, correction, grading, and "red penciling" are not allowed and some teachers even view any writing on the child's work as unacceptable and use Post-itTM notes to make comments rather than writing on the child's work (Routman, 1991). Journal writing of any kind in the whole language classroom is viewed as "a time to exchange ideas, experiences, and feelings" (Crafton, 1991, p. 164). Second, the journals themselves are typically simple spiral notebooks, but may be something as basic as several sheets of loose-leaf paper stapled together. The paper itself may be lined or unlined, but in my experience, unlined paper often works better with younger children such as kindergarteners whose fine motor skills are still developing. Third, depending on the type of journal used, the time spent on journal writing will vary, and it really is up to the teacher and the type and purpose of the journal--no classroom is the same. Personal journals might involve five to ten minutes of writing, while reading response journals might involve fifteen or more minutes here and there during a forty-five minute time set aside for reading a selection. Time is not all-important with whole language teachers, but rather the concept of what the children are doing and learning is.

Finally, just as it is important to present ourselves as readers to children, it is just as important to present ourselves as writers. Therefore, in a whole language classroom it is

desirable for the teacher to write in his or her journal several times a week while the students also write. Linda Crafton (1991, p. 163) best sums up the value of journals by saying:

Much more than simply communicating what we know, writing helps to clarify a complex world, allows for intimate exchanges of thought, lets us capture our in-process thinking so we can examine and revise it, and most exciting, encourages a discovery of ideas and relationships.

While journals are one very visible activity in the whole language classroom, writing workshop is also frequently found within the whole language classroom. Basically, writing workshop consists of time set aside specifically for the writing process--time for students to work on pieces of writing. Once again, writing workshops may differ, but all involve the same basic elements as described by Joni Weed in Organizing for Whole Language (1991). Weed describes her writing workshop as a time period of approximately thirty to forty minutes during which students are engaged in writing. Students write on self-selected topics, styles, and formats, with occasional specific assignments from her, usually on a topic they have been studying in class. The students are encouraged to concentrate on content as they write their first draft. When they complete one piece, they are to begin another and only after three drafts have been

completed may they choose one to revise and publish. Next, they schedule a peer conference which is an opportunity for questions, comments, and suggestions by a peer. Any revising is taken into account by the student author who then schedules with the teacher a publishing conference. The teacher reviews the piece of writing, focusing on content more than trying to impose revision on the child. The child then edits the piece in preparation for a final teacher conference, and publishing is scheduled.

Essentially, writing workshop gives students many opportunities to write, for as any whole language teacher knows, writing both fosters an understanding of writing and expresses it (Weaver, 1990). Clearly writing workshop provides the student with skill learning in the context of editing conferences with the teacher, reading and writing relationships in the context of writing, editing, and publishing, as well as the social experience of peer and teacher conferencing in the whole language classroom.

Right along with writing workshop as a part of the whole language classroom, shared writing also finds its way into the classroom on a regular basis. Shared writing, the process by which the teacher and student create collaborative writings, can take many forms. Shared writing may consist of writing original story endings, class journal entries, stories, and even class rules and charts. In many classrooms, the first week of school is spent creating shared writings that establish

the rules and procedures of the room. This form of shared writing is particularly valuable in that it provides for students the chance to guide the daily procedures as well as discipline of the classroom, and therefore a great feeling of ownership is created out of an authentic activity. As these charts, stories, and other writings are created, children see the teacher perform in an authentic act of writing. The teacher makes very clear his or her thought process and actions in relation to such items as format, handwriting, spelling, and punctuation. In this way, shared writing acts as a powerful tool in relating to children that their observations combined with the teacher's guidance, greatly improves the writing quality (Routman, 1991).

A period of sharing is another activity or element that can often reveal a whole language classroom. Sharing time in the classroom may involve simply forming a circle or group and sharing whatever comes to mind, a piece of writing created, or book enjoyed. This of all activities is one of the most straightforward and simple to arrange for planning and grouping are, for the most part, unnecessary. The benefits to such a simple activity are wonderful. When children choose to share personal writing, it is clearly the acceptance of an invitation to choose their best work, which encourages the highly desired self-evaluation (Routman, 1991). Sharing, discussions concerning what the child has done, how it was done, and why, frequently encourages the birth of new ideas to be explored later by other children. Sharing time truly is a necessary element of the

whole language classroom, for as Jean Ann Clyde states, "Sharing time demonstrates an appreciation for both the uniqueness of the individual and the social nature of the natural curriculum" (1990, p. 38).

Another vital activity to the whole language classroom, as well as an easy to implement activity is that of SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) also known as DEAR (Drop Everything And Read). SSR (as I will refer to it) involves students individually reading for a sustained period of time on a regular basis. According to Regie Routman, SSR "is one of the most important strategies for increasing fluency, vocabulary, and overall reading ability" (1991, p. 396). As far as the sustained time for which students are to read, the decision is based upon the teacher and the age of the students. For older students, many teachers find that beginning with five to ten minutes a day of sustained reading time works well, with students working slowly up to periods of twenty to thirty minutes. On the other hand, Karen Smith (1990) shares that she begins her school year with forty-five minutes of SSR, and by the end of the year carries on SSR for periods of ninety minutes without interruption. With SSR, students are allowed to choose their own reading material under the assumption that they will read for the specified time. In my experience, I have discovered that students often sustain themselves for longer periods of time when they are allowed to choose areas of the room that they may make themselves comfortable in, such as lying near

a window or sitting casually on the floor in a corner. Again, just as we demonstrate that we are writers, we also need to demonstrate that we are readers, and therefore the whole language teacher can nearly always be found reading right along with his or her students. SSR truly does fit within the framework of whole language. Not only does it provide whole text for reading and implementation of the wide variety of literature available in the whole language classroom, but it also provides students with ownership by allowing them to choose the books they read and with which they interact.

Near SSR in a whole language classroom one often finds the activity of reading aloud. One will always find teachers reading aloud material of all types quite often in a whole language classroom. In kindergarten and first-grade classrooms in particular, teachers read a great deal of favorite books and poems repeatedly. However, in any classroom, the read aloud may be a poem, chapter in a book, or a short story. Regie Routman, in her book entitled Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners K-12 (1991, p. 32), informs us that "Reading is seen as the single most influential factor in young children's success in learning to read". Whether the teacher chooses to sit in front of his or her class or gather them as a group around him or her on the floor, reading aloud of material assists children in building their listening skills, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, as well as creates a positive impact on their attitudes toward reading.

Building upon the concept of reading aloud, shared reading also holds a common role in the whole language classroom. Shared book reading is different from the concept of reading aloud in that the students can actually see the text as the teacher reads it to them. By seeing the text, children are able to gain print awareness, identify and uncover letter, word, and sentence relationships, develop a sense of punctuation, and come to understand the relationship between reading and oral language (Wepner & Feeley, 1993).

In most situations, shared reading can be recognized by the teacher sitting on or near the floor with the students gathered around him or her. The book is generally introduced to the children with particular emphasis on story predictions and book concepts such as title, author, and table of contents. The book or other material is usually read first by the teacher and many times students will attempt to read along, if not just follow the text visually. In the lower grades where print concepts are not yet fully grasped, the teacher often points to various conventions to promote visibility and encourage student connections. The text should be, and often is, read repeatedly for enjoyment. It is not until the third reading or more that the teacher uses any teaching strategies. Teachers have been known to cover high-frequency words through the shared reading text as one cloze type of teaching strategy, but like so many other aspects of the whole language theory, the use of the shared reading as far as instruction is purely dependent

upon teacher choice and individual classroom settings. Shared reading times in whole language classrooms are relaxed and very social, with student interaction welcomed by the teacher (Routman, 1991).

Shared reading has several benefits, one of which is that it can be adapted to paired reading, where one more able reader is followed in reading by a less able reader. The less able reader, with no pressure, follows and enjoys the story. A second advantage is that through shared reading, students are able to be immersed in good literature without worry by the teacher or student of grade level or reading performance (Routman, 1991).

As extensions to reading, whole language classrooms frequently sport literature extensions. Literature extensions are simply activities which extend the comprehension and enjoyment of literature read by students. Literature extensions are typically completed after reading a selection or a portion of a selection. Once the reading is complete, the student decides upon some activity to complete that serves as a culmination to their understanding of the reading. Once the activity is complete, the final step generally is to share the completed activity (Tompkins & McGee, 1993). The activities that a student may choose from are endless!! A student might choose to pretend that he was a character in the particular story that he has read and write a series of diary entries from that characters point of view, or the student might describe how a specific character might fit into the classroom. The

— student might choose to compare and contrast several books written by the author who wrote the piece that has been read or write a conversation between herself and the author (Stone, 1990). The possibilities are truly limitless--students might create charts, webs, or posters of all types to share what they have read, or perhaps illustrations, new stories, or a Readers' Theater presentation. Students develop presentations that mold with their needs in relating the story (Kauffman & Yoder, 1990). The choice for how the child will present the reading creates the ownership of the activity, while the project itself through development and creation provides authenticity of writing and reading as a whole language activity.

Although varied greatly in their implementation, literature discussion groups are another common element of the whole language classroom. According to Constance Weaver (1990), these groups are tremendously different from typical reading groups because the child chooses the book that he or she will read, and the role of the teacher is not to grill the students on their comprehension, but rather to engage the students in discussion. The concept of the group itself is fairly simple. Students who have chosen the same book to read meet in small groups based not on ability but rather by the fact that they have chosen the same material. The group reads the material over a period of time, often keeping a reading response journal of comments, questions, vocabulary, or anything that interests them, to share with the group. Groups may be rather large in

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number--with six or seven people, or smaller--with three or four people. In the larger groups, the topics to be discussed tend to be greater in number and the rate of discussion tends to be faster with so many students trying to share. On the other hand, smaller groups, while allowing for fewer topics most times, provide more opportunity and time for sharing the varied opinions and add more depth to the opinions. Group members decide as a whole each time that they meet when it is that they will meet next, as well as how much is to be read. Some groups meet regularly, others do not. These literature discussion groups often begin by either retelling the story, or assessing comprehension of the story by all group members through various questions and comments. Regardless of the content, literature discussion groups rarely are predictable in their content, but are predictable in that they will always deal with what the group members find most interesting about what they have read. Members rarely fail to accomplish the reading that the group defines to be completed, for failure to read the material results in an inability to discuss the material in the group setting. On a whole, when children are provided the opportunity "to talk about their learning experiences, those experiences are extended, revised, and enriched" (Crafton, 1991, p. 182). Literature groups without a doubt provide the social and functional use of reading and sharing that encourages comprehension and that whole language so clearly strives for.

What is to follow is a list and somewhat brief discussion of some activities or elements of a whole language classroom that though they are not large or perhaps highly visible or impactful, do deserve mention. Whole language classrooms invariably contain a print-rich element. A variety of print sources can be found in a whole language classroom. Alphabet strips and picture charts contribute to the richness of print, as do wall charts which group various words in relation to a theme such as vocabulary from a story, high frequency words, or even content words. These lists and charts, having all been generated by and with the students, encourage them to use not only conventional spelling, but also more independence in their writing. Labels and signs for everything from the door to the chalkboard, as well as calendars, name tags, and messages written on the chalkboard that students may see over and over again have a powerful and positive impact on the reading and writing of the children (Routman, 1991).

It is important to stress that the students be allowed to create these labels, messages, and such. When the print is created by and for the students, a reflection of authentic and meaningful reading and writing is created (Routman, 1991). Sign-in sheets for attendance work well because they not only provide attendance and lunch counts, but they also present an authentic context for writing and reading as well as documented writing growth (Clyde, 1990). A message board, which is a bulletin board covered with paper, promotes a great deal of

reading and writing communication with its use. The message board can be written on by students and the teacher alike and can be used not only to communicate, but also to work out classroom problems and recognize positive student behavior (Routman, 1991). Student mailboxes within the classroom serve a similar purpose. Both the message board and the mailboxes allow for direct, one-on-one contact that is valuable to student achievement. Whether the messages or mail are notes concerning family, achievement, or a simple greeting, they ultimately encourage and reinforce the reading and writing relationship through functional and authentic use in the whole language classroom (Crafton, 1991). Listening centers are also essential whether they are used to listen to recordings of favorite books as children follow along in texts or whether they are used for listening to a story repeatedly before a student is able to read. All reasons aside, listening centers provide opportunity for increased fluency, exposure to words and vocabulary, and pleasure for the student (Routman, 1991). A publishing center is a final element which contributes to the whole language classroom. With the great amount of writing that occurs in the whole language classroom, publishing seems a natural. When works are published, the child's writing is in a sense celebrated. Their confidence is increased in their writing abilities, and the context for revision as a part of the publication process is created (Cousin & Lancaster, 1990). Further, for many children, the act of publishing creates a

sense of literacy simply for the fact that their own writing may be the first success they have at reading (Routman, 1991).

The activities and elements of a whole language classroom are as varied in number as they are implementation. Their use and format relies solely on the individual teachers and students who are faced with using them on a daily basis within the whole language classroom.

The beliefs have been stated. The elements shared. The whole language picture is nearly complete save one element--that of evaluation. Evaluation is an important issue, one that as teachers, we are all accountable for. For many teachers, the assessment and accountability of whole language are the most troublesome (Au, Scheu, Kawakami, & Herman, 1990). However, in the eye of whole language philosophy, it is more than simple "evaluation" or assessment, and more than just a teacher being held accountable. This last portion of my paper is meant to share and ease the roles that assessment and evaluation play in the whole language picture, as well as the approach I consider to be the trademark for whole language, that of portfolio assessment.

When speaking of evaluation, the evaluation of the traditional classroom is the first to come to mind. Instantly, people think of the standardized test and skills-oriented approach to evaluation summed up by a report card with a simple letter grade of "A", "B", "C", "D", or "F". With whole language, a new mindset is needed, beginning with terminology and purpose.

The term "evaluation" does not suffice. To be effective, one must use both "assessment" and "evaluation". To many, these terms are synonymous although in actuality, they are anything but synonymous. According to Regie Routman (1991, p. 302), "'Assessment' refers to data collection and the gathering of evidence. 'Evaluation' implies bringing meaning to that data through interpretation, analysis, and reflection and includes the kinds of instructional decisions that are made by careful examination of the evidence." In regard to whole language, the approach necessary takes into account both assessment and evaluation. The two are very much dependent upon each other and without assessment, evaluation would appear to be non-existent. The data and evidence gained through assessment are vital to the decision-making that occurs within evaluation. For the large part of this area of the paper, I will use the term "assessment" in relation to the collection of data and more specifically the portfolio assessment that is to be discussed.

With the emergence of whole language and its beliefs that learning must be authentic, functional, and integrated to name a few, teachers came to realize that they needed to look beyond norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests for methods of representing student performance that were more closely linked to instruction (Jongsma, 1989). In the whole language classroom, the assessment must follow the lead of the whole language philosophy itself. In other words, assessment must be authentic,

multidimensional, on-going, and interactive (Valencia, 1990a). These characteristics can all be found within the beliefs of the whole language philosophy.

What form of assessment can possibly reflect such characteristics? According to teachers, an approach was needed that communicated to students, parents, administrators, and themselves, the real literacy achievements of students, one with a more complex picture of literacy, a more complete story than has been able to be presented with existing measures (Valencia, 1990b). The answer to this question is viewed by many as the trademark of whole language--portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment incorporates several different strategies for gathering information (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991). The portfolio generally consists of a large folder for holding individual student work. Because every curriculum is different, as are students and teachers, the portfolio may differ for any and all who choose to use it. The items included within a portfolio are not prescribed, however, the key is to ensure a **variety** of indicators of learning so that a complete picture of the student's development may be constructed by anyone from parents and administrators, to the students and teachers themselves (Valencia, 1990a).

Although nearly anything can be found within a portfolio, several items are consistently a part of portfolio assessment and generally, are informal in nature. Reading logs are an item frequently found within portfolios. Quite simply, the

reading log is a record by the student of both the title and author of each book read. By looking at a student's reading log, a teacher can assess the growth of voluntary reading (Au, et al., 1990).

Anecdotal records are also used frequently in portfolio assessment. Anecdotal records are "dated, informal observational notations that describe language development in terms of the learner's attitudes, strengths, weaknesses, needs, progress, learning styles, skills, strategies used, or anything else that seems significant at the time of observation" (Routman, 1991, p. 309). Anecdotal records, written and placed in the portfolio by the teacher, are important in that they convey information concerning a student over time in a very concrete manner.

Anecdotal records can be taken in nearly any setting, according to teacher needs, and although they are generally taken on an individual student by the teacher through observation of the student or the student's work in a particular context, the entire process depends entirely on the teacher's needs. As part of the portfolio, anecdotal records are important in that they serve as benchmarks for noting student progress and assist in setting instructional goals. Furthermore, they help provide documented facts for written narratives on reports and encourage reflection on student growth. When writing anecdotal records, it is important for the teacher's comments to start positively. To begin positively reinforces the student-centered, positive belief of whole language. Although kept by the teacher,

anecdotal records are meant to be shared, as is everything in the portfolio, collaboratively with the student.

Checklists are another aspect of portfolios often implemented. Checklists can be used by both teachers and students alike and work very well for the collection of many different types of data, once again, depending on the users purpose. Regie Routman (1991) in her book Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners K-12, tells how she likes to use a checklist, combined with narrative and observational comments when observing early literacy behaviors such as letter-sound knowledge. Checklists such as these can be adaptations of curriculum guides, objectives, or developmental skills lists placed with class lists (Linek, 1991). Students themselves can implement the checklist in many different manners. Students might use the checklist to monitor their choice of various genres in their reading, or perhaps various classmates that they have worked with at different times on various projects throughout class time. Students may also implement the use of a checklist by checking for evidence of specific skills before completing assignments. Students are not only providing a piece of work for their portfolio, but they are also placing themselves in command of their own learning which is a strong belief of whole language (Routman, 1991).

Surveys or questionnaires emerge as elements to be included in the portfolio. Surveys and questionnaires can take many forms and relate to any content area a teacher desires. If

interested in designing a reading survey, the teacher could ask such questions as: "Who is your favorite author?", "What is your favorite book?", or "Was there ever a book you did not enjoy?". Providing students with surveys and questionnaires allows the teacher yet another view of the student, including the student's attitude toward the subject surveyed, what the student may have learned, and the student's suggestions for improvement (Routman, 1991). Moreover, questionnaires asking "how to" questions involving reading and writing may be used in the portfolio to document metacognition and use of strategies (Linek, 1991).

Another widely used aspect of portfolio assessment is that of conferences. Conferences are a tool that can be used in many ways. Generally, in a conference, the student says something about himself or herself or his or her work and the teacher provides instructional support. What the student shares, whether it be a book, a piece of writing, or the portfolio itself, is entirely up to the student. Conferences give the students opportunity to evaluate themselves, their reading, and their books, all of which the teacher uses to better understand the student (Hansen, 1992). With conferencing, the teacher is by and large, a listener and guide for the student. Through conferences, the students' attitudes and thinking can be documented, and it is through these conferences that teachers may make anecdotal observations (Linek, 1991; Routman, 1991).

Portfolios are also known to include student journals.

Journals can be an important part of the portfolio in that they document many writing skills. By looking through a journal, a teacher may easily evaluate spelling, grammar usage, handwriting, and mechanical skills, as well as content and ideas (Routman, 1991). Furthermore, student journals provide documentation of student thinking and self-evaluation, with self-evaluation emerging through teachers encouraging students to look back through journal writings and use checklists to note the use of particular skills (Linek, 1991; Routman, 1991).

Retellings are becoming an increasingly popular addition to the portfolio. As one might think, the concept involves asking a student to simply "retell" a story in their own words. This strategy is effective in evaluating comprehension of story elements and long range comprehension. If a student has difficulty, the teacher may guide the process with probing questions which force the student to rethink the passage, and therefore improve the quality of their retellings (Routman, 1991). This particular strategy greatly enhances the strong literacy relationship of reading and oral language so important to whole language.

Including video or audio tapes in portfolios allows documentation of reading miscues, fluency development, use of strategies, use of time, and other important data that can be observed and discussed during conference times with the student and teacher (Linek, 1991). Students might also choose to include reading passages in their portfolios. For example, a

first-grader might include in a portfolio a photocopy of text read early in the year with few and repetitive words, and one text read later in the year with a varied text (Flood & Lapp, 1989). Students might choose to include samples of various writings from early drafts to published books (Gomez, Graue, & Bloch, 1991). The inclusion of samples from the writing process allows for documentation of the students' development in this area. What is chosen to be placed in the portfolio is optional, however, as shared by Kathleen Stumpf Jongsma, "the portfolio itself should not become a collection of weekly graded papers. Rather, the portfolio should be viewed as a growing, evolving description of students' reading and writing experiences" (1989, p. 264).

Clearly, what goes into the portfolio depends largely on what the teacher and student contribute to the portfolio. In the case of anecdotal records, the teacher will be the one who submits the material, while in the case of a poem or journal, it will be the student. Some teachers feel that it is the student who holds the primary responsibility for what gets placed within the portfolio. Whatever the view, the portfolio approach to assessment is a collaborative one. The teacher and student must realize that the portfolio is to be representative of all of the processes and products involved in the students' reading and writing. With the portfolio, teachers are able to develop valuable insights about the students' maturing reading and writing skills, and their attitudes and interests, while the

students will become more reflective about their own reading and writing (Jongsma, 1989).

In conclusion, what in education's name is it? Whole language is a philosophy supported by firm beliefs in the use of whole text, skills taught within the context of reading and writing, and the reciprocal relationship of reading and writing. Whole language also supports itself with beliefs in literature, the natural and social aspect of learning, functional use, integration, and the role of child empowerment. From these beliefs evolve activities and elements of whole language that by themselves and without the containment of the beliefs, would be nothing more than activities in themselves, useless to the education of children. At last came the evaluation of whole language. Through portfolio assessment comes a manner in which to provide accountability consistent with the beliefs of whole language. The question now to be answered? Can I do it? Yes. Should I like it? I love it! Is it for me? I believe that this educational movement called whole language no longer has a "For Sale" sign for me. The sign suddenly reads "Sold".

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